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ABSTRACT

This study examined facilitating factors and barriers in the process of accommodating college students with learning disabilities in the classroom. Surveys were mailed to 480 faculty members at the University of Massachusetts who had received an accommodation form from the university's Learning Disabilities Support Services Office. The survey focused on faculty members' degree of ease or difficulty in implementing accommodations, the perceived adequacy of support, and their own beliefs and understandings concerning the need for and benefit of providing accommodations. Analysis of the 182 returned surveys suggest that beliefs about the helpfulness and need of accommodations has an effect on provision. In addition, perception of support from elements of the University, especially the Learning Disabilities Support Services Office, influenced the ease of providing accommodations. A significant difference was found between the behavior of professors and instructors/teaching assistants, with the latter reporting it was easier to provide accommodations. (Contains 11 references.) (Author/DB)

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Tracing The Links In The Chain Of Accommodation: A Study Of University Of Massachusetts' Faculty Members' Provision Of Accommodations To Students With Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

The existing research on the accommodation process of college students with learning disabilities focuses on attitudes and theoretical models without delineating actual practices. To date the discussion of facilitating factors and barriers to this process has been broad and lacking specificity. Surveys were mailed to 485 faculty members at the University of Massachusetts who received an accommodation form from the office of Learning Disabilities Support Services in the Fall of 1995. The survey focused on the faculty members' degree of ease or difficulty in implementing accommodations, the perceived adequacy of support, and their own beliefs and understandings concerning the need for and benefit of providing accommodations. The results suggest that beliefs about the helpfulness and need of accommodations impacts provision. Additionally, perception of support from elements of the University influenced the ease of providing accommodations. A significant difference was found between the behavior of professors and instructors/TA's.

Tracing The Links In The Chain Of Accommodation:
A Study Of University Of Massachusetts' Professors' Provisions Of Accommodations To Students With Learning Disabilities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 set forth the requirement that federally funded programs and activities must provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities. Both Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act extend to post-secondary educational institutions. As a result of these regulations, universities have adopted formal methods by which students with disabilities request accommodations from professors. Students with learning disabilities are also covered under these regulations and presently more than 500 students at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst have documented learning disabilities and receive services through Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS). At the University, the process is concretized through the use of a form which identifies the student and the accommodations requested. This form is then provided to the students' professors.

Issues concerning the accommodation process for college students with learning disabilities have been addressed in both the literature on disabilities in general and in the literature specifically focused on learning disabilities services. Baggett's 1994 study of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst's faculty awareness of students with disabilities revealed that faculty members lack experience teaching students with disabilities, are unfamiliar with disability rights laws, and are unfamiliar with University services for students with disabilities. As a result of his study, Baggett recommended a series of workshops to educate faculty members as a means to improve the accommodation process. Heyward, Lawton & Associates (1995) address the legal ramifications of non-compliance with ADA laws by university faculty members as well as the administration's role in providing a supportive environment to foster "... conditions that will create a positive, productive climate for interactions between faculty members, service providers, and students" (p. 4).

The majority of the research on the learning disability accommodation process has been focused on faculties' attitudes toward accommodations (Houck, Asselin, Troutman, and Arrington, 1992; Matthew, Anderson, and Skolnick, 1987; Schmidt, 1982), and on theoretical discussion of what is a "reasonable accommodation" (Scott, 1990; 1991). There has also been limited research on faculties' willingness to accommodate students with learning disabilities (Nelson, Dodd, and Smith, 1990; Satcher, 1992). Researchers have also outlined possible barriers to the implementation of accommodations and have suggested a "team" approach involving the student, the LD service providers, and the faculty members (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, and McGuire, 1992).

In all, the existing research on the accommodation process focuses on attitudes and theoretical models without delineating actual practices. The discussion of barriers to this process has been broad and lacking the identification of specific barriers. The intent of the present research was to take the study of accommodations further by focusing on the behaviors of faculty members and levels of institutional support.

The importance of this study is rooted in social psychological theory concerning attitudes and behaviors. Ajzen and Fishbein (1982) posit that attitudes do not necessarily predict behaviors and that situational and environmental factors have been found to be

strong influences on behaviors. Thus, the existing research concerning attitudes about accommodations does not necessarily make any predictions regarding the actual provision of requested accommodations.

The purpose of this research was to begin the search for possible institutional factors that either facilitate or hinder the accommodation process. The accommodations addressed in this study included: providing untimed exams, proctoring exams, providing copies of notes and outlines to students, recruiting note takers, providing alternative types of exams, and providing additional time to complete assignments.

There were three basic research questions: 1). What was the degree of ease or difficulty faculty had in implementing various accommodations for students with learning disabilities, 2). How was the provision of the above accommodations impacted by the perceived level of adequacy of support the faculty members received, the perceived level of sufficiency of resources available to faculty members to provide these accommodations, and the faculty members' own beliefs and understandings concerning the need for and benefit of providing accommodations, and 3). Whether any of the demographic characteristics were significantly related to the provision of accommodations, perceived support, and understanding of the need for accommodations.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was mailed to 485 faculty members at the University of Massachusetts. The sample included every University faculty member who received an accommodation form from the office of Learning Disabilities Support Services in the Fall of 1995. This form identified a student who required an accommodation due to a documented learning disability. The survey was developed expressly for this study and focused upon faculty members ability to provide requested accommodations, their perception of support, and their level of understanding concerning the need for accommodations. Additionally, general demographic information was obtained; however, the survey was devised to provide anonymity to the respondents.

One hundred and seventy surveys were returned (35%), eight surveys were not included in the analysis due to their being incomplete. Of those responding, 14.9% were lecturers, 16.8% were assistant professors, 19.3% were associate professors, 32.3% were full professors, and 16.8% were "other." Slightly more than 80% were full-time employees of the University. More than 56% of respondents reported that their primary responsibility was combined teaching and research, while 36.4% reported teaching as their primary responsibility. Four percent stated that administration was their primary responsibility, and the remainder was distributed among research, advising, and "other." The median number of years of teaching experience in higher education was 7 to 15 years, similarly the median number of years at the University of Massachusetts was 7 to 15 years. Forty percent of the respondents were female. The median age of the respondents was between thirty-one and 40 years old.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed using SPSS software package. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were calculated for the responses to the variables. Next, correlation

coefficients were completed followed by ANOVA's. The r-values reported in this section had p values less than or equal to .05.

The frequency of responses to the survey questions are presented below. These data are presented along with the survey questions as they appeared to the respondents. It is noteworthy that the valence of the questions was varied in order to avoid response sets from being established.

Table 1 Frequency of Responses to Survey Questions

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
1) It has been easy to arrange untimed exams in quiet areas in my department.	37 28.5%	63 48.5%	20 15.4%	10 7.7%	32
2) It has been difficult for me to arrange proctored exams at LDSS.	10 13.5%	16 21.6%	29 39.2%	19 29.7%	88
3) It has been easy to provide copies of notes/outlines to students with learning disabilities prior to class.	19 18.8%	24 23.8%	27 26.7%	31 30.7%	61
4) It has been difficult to recruit note takers for students with learning disabilities.	12 31.6%	7 18.4%	13 34.2%	6 15.8%	124
5) It has been easy to provide alternative types of exams when requested.	19 19.8%	28 29.2%	26 27.1%	23 24.0%	66
6) It has been difficult to provide students the accommodation of additional time to complete assignments.	5 3.6%	19 13.9%	57 41.6%	56 40.9%	25
7) I believe the accommodations provided for students with learning disabilities helps them to succeed better in my course(s).	48 33.3%	71 49.3%	24 16.7%	1 .7%	18
8) I receive adequate support from the Deans of the College in working with students who have learning disabilities.	9 18.0%	17 34.0%	11 22.0%	13 26.0%	112
9) I receive adequate support from the office of Learning Disabilities Support Services in working with students who have learning disabilities.	33 26.0%	62 48.8%	26 20.5%	6 4.7%	35
10) I receive adequate support from my Department in working with students who have	25 25.3%	53 53.5%	15 15.2%	6 6.1%	63

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
learning disabilities.					
11) I receive adequate support from the Faculty Senate in working with students who have learning disabilities.	3 15.0%	5 25.0%	8 40.0%	4 20.0%	142
12) I am uncertain who to call when I have a question regarding students' accommodations for their learning disabilities.	6 4.0%	21 14.1%	67 45.0%	55 36.9%	13
13) My resources are insufficient to implement the requested accommodations.	14 10.1%	25 18.0%	65 46.8%	35 25.2%	23
14) I have a good understanding of why accommodations for students with learning disabilities are necessary.	66 42.9%	61 39.6%	22 14.3%	5 3.2%	8

In order to facilitate the inferential data analysis several steps were taken to simplify the interpretation of the results. First, variables 2, 4, 6, 12, and 13 were reverse coded in order to make all of the statements similarly valenced. For example, by reverse coding variable number 2, it was transformed from "It has been difficult for me to arrange proctored exams at LDSS" to "It has been easy for me to arrange proctored exams at LDSS." The second step that was taken was to adjust the coding so that higher numbers were indicative of positive behaviors, such that a coding of 4 equaled strong agreement with the statement.

While the authors have grouped the data below by variables, it is not possible at this point to establish directionality or causality, only that a relationship exists.

Number of Students:

Respondents were requested to report the number of students with learning disabilities who requested accommodations in their class during the Fall 1995 academic semester. The data suggests that as the number of students requesting accommodations increased, the respondents perceived the sufficiency of their resources to implement the accommodations to decrease ($r=-.23$, $n=139$). Similarly, as the number of students requesting accommodations increased, the respondents reported greater difficulty in providing alternative types of exams ($r=-.22$, $n=94$).

Respondents' Perceptions of Accommodations:

Belief in Accommodations: Respondents were asked to rate their level of belief that accommodations provided to students with learning disabilities help students better succeed in their course(s). The data suggests that the stronger the respondents' belief that accommodations help students succeed, the greater the respondent's level of

understanding concerning the necessity for such accommodations (r=.60, n=139). Also, the stronger the respondents' belief that accommodations help students succeed, the easier it was for them to provide alternative types of exams (r=.39, n=88) and additional time for students to complete assignments (r=.18, n=125).

Understanding Accommodations: Respondents were asked to rate their level of understanding of the necessity of accommodations for students with learning disabilities. The greater the respondents' understanding of the need for accommodations, the easier it was for them to provide alternative types of exams (r=.23, n=92) and additional time for students to complete assignments (r=.20, n=132).

Support and Beliefs:

The data suggests that the greater the perceived level of support from LDSS the greater the understanding was for the need for accommodations (r=.30, n=122). Also, the greater the perceived level of support from LDSS the greater the belief that accommodations help students succeed (r=.40, n=115). In addition, increased support from one's own academic department was positively related to respondent's belief that that accommodations help students succeed (r=.25, n=89).

Support and Accommodations:

Perceived Support from LDSS: Respondents were asked to rate their perceived level of support from the office of LDSS. The data suggests that the greater the perceived level of support, the greater the respondents perceived the sufficiency of their resources to implement the accommodations (r=.51, n=116). Also, the greater the respondents' perceived level of support from LDSS, the easier it was for them to provide untimed tests (r=.34, n=105), proctored exams at LDSS (r=.37, n=63), additional time to complete assignments (r=.22, n=109), and alternative types of exams (r=.40, n=81).

Perceived Support from Department: Respondents were asked to rate their perceived level of support from their own department. The data suggests that the greater the perceived level of support, the greater the respondents perceived the sufficiency of their resources to implement the accommodations (r=.47, n=90). Also, the greater the respondents' perceived level of support from their department, the easier it was for them to provide untimed tests (r=.40, n=80), to provide copies of notes and outlines (r=.34, n=72), and alternative types of exams (r=.29, n=69).

Relationship: The data suggests a relationship between the respondents' perceived support from LDSS and their perceived support from their own department. The greater the support from LDSS, the greater the support from the department (r=.65, n=89).

Table 2 Significant Correlation Coefficients of Level of Support and Accommodation Type

	LEVEL OF SUPPORT					
	Deans of College	LDSS	Department	Faculty Senate	Who To Call	Sufficient Resources
ACCOMMODATIONS						
Untimed Exams	r=.46 n=42	r=.34 n=105	r=.40 n=80			r=.26 n=116
Proctored Exams		r=.37 n=63			r=.25 n=70	r=.33 n=66
Providing Notes	r=.47 n=41		r=.34 n=72			r=.32 n=90
Note Taker					r=.49 n=35	
Alternative Exam	r=.52 n=38	r=.40 n=81	r=.29 n=69	r=.67 n=15		r=.54 n=88
Additional Time		r=.22 n=109			r=.20 n=128	r=.27 n=124

Level of Accommodation:

Table 3 Significant Intercorrelations of Accommodation Types

Accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Untimed Test (1)	-------		r=.36 n=88		r=.30 n=91	
Proctored Test (2)		---------			r=.30 n=54	r=.37 n=64
Providing Notes (3)	r=.36 n=88		----------	r=.35 n=36	r=.36 n=75	
Note Taker (4)			r=.35 n=36	----------		
Alternative Exam (5)	r=.30 n=91	r=.30 n=54	r=.36 n=75		----------	r=.25 n=92
Additional Time (6)		r=.37 n=64			r=.25 n=92	---------- -

The above table presents the significant intercorrelations of respondents' ease of providing assorted accommodations. The data suggests that respondents who found it easier to provide alternative types of exams, the easier it was for them to provide untimed tests, proctored tests, copes of notes and outlines, and additional time to complete assignments.

ANOVA's:

ANOVA's were calculated in order to investigate whether the fluctuations in the number of respondents in the above correlations were significant. One of the authors'

concerns was that respondents might self select in the pattern of responses. No significant results were obtained, suggesting that the participants who responded to both stems in a correlation pair were not significantly different than those who only responded to one of the two stems.

ANOVA's were also calculated in order to determine if any significant differences existed between demographic data and variables. Three categories of demographic data (Academic Title, Age, Full/Part Time Status, and Gender) were significant across four variables (see tables 4-6). The five categories of the Academic Title variable were collapsed into two categories (professor or non-professor). This new demographic variable resulted in significance with eight variables (see table 7).

Table 4 Significant ANOVA's for Academic Title and Variables 6, 7, 13, 14.

Variable	Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Sum of Squares	F-Ratio	P
6.	Between	4	6.6685	1.6671	2.6775	.0346
	Within	131	81.5668	.6226		
7.	Between	4	6.9295	1.7324	3.6396	.0075
	Within	138	65.6858	.4760		
13.	Between	4	11.9016	2.9754	3.8892	.0051
	Within	133	101.7506	.7650		
14.	Between	4	8.8061	2.2015	3.5775	.0081
	Within	148	91.0763	.6154		

Table 5 Significant ANOVA's for Part/Full Time Status and Variables 7, 14.

Variable	Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Sum of Squares	F-Ratio	P
7.	Between	1	3.5278	3.5278	7.2485	.0079
	Within	142	69.1110	.4867		
14.	Between	1	5.6190	5.6190	9.0023	.0032
	Within	152	94.8745	.6242		

Table 6 Significant ANOVA's for Gender and Variable 14.

Variable	Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Sum of Squares	F-Ratio	P
14.	Between	1	3.6983	3.6983	6.0813	.0148
	Within	151	91.8311	.6082		

Table 7 Significant ANOVA's for Collapsed Academic Title and Variables 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14.

Variable	Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Sum of Squares	F-Ratio	P
3	Between	1	6.7841	6.7841	5.8554	.0174
	Within	99	114.7011	1.1586		
5.	Between	1	4.3256	4.3256	3.9319	.0503
	Within	94	103.4139	1.1001		
6.	Between	1	5.8099	5.8099	9.3520	.0027
	Within	135	83.8689	.6213		
7.	Between	1	5.8368	5.8368	12.4072	.0006
	Within	142	66.8021	.4704		
8.	Between	1	5.8237	5.8237	5.5358	.0228
	Within	48	50.4963	1.0520		
9.	Between	1	4.7867	4.7867	7.6694	.0065
	Within	125	78.0164	.6241		
13.	Between	1	9.3425	9.3425	12.2684	.0006
	Within	137	104.3266	.7615		
14.	Between	1	7.5447	7.5447	12.3378	.0006
	Within	152	92.9488	.6115		

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to begin the search for possible institutional factors that either facilitate or hinder the accommodation process. The descriptive data reported was the first step in investigating this question. The frequencies for the statements pertaining to the ease/difficulty in providing accommodations point to an overall perception of ease in providing an array of accommodations; however, this level of analysis masks underlying differences amongst accommodations. Therefore further inferential analysis was necessary to differentiate between the levels of accommodations and factors that either facilitate or hinder their provision. One factor investigated was the number of students with learning disabilities enrolled in a given class. The results suggest that respondents perceived their resources to be less sufficient as the number of students with learning disabilities increased in their classroom. While this finding is relatively obvious, the secondary finding that the provision of alternative types of exams was negatively related to increased number of students suggests that for accommodations which are more labor intensive, such as developing alternative tests, that respondents require greater resources.

Both the beliefs about the efficacy of accommodations and the understanding of the importance of accommodations was found to be related to increased support from LDSS. This finding suggests that the relationship established between LDSS and the respondents was an important factor in increasing knowledge about accommodations. In addition, increased support from respondents' own academic department influenced the belief that accommodations help students succeed better. These finding become of even greater import when we look at the relationships between beliefs and the provision of accommodations. Respondents' own beliefs about the efficacy of accommodations was significantly related to providing alternative types of exams and providing additional time

for students to complete assignments. Similar results were found for increased understanding of the need for accommodations. This finding suggests that a respondent's own beliefs can have either a facilitating or detrimental impact on the provision of accommodations.

The results concerning the relationship of support to accommodations does suggest the primacy of respondents' perceiving support from LDSS. It is noteworthy that only two types of accommodations were not significantly related to support from LDSS: providing notes and arranging for a note taker. It is possible that this was a result of these two accommodations falling more in the hands of the respondents. The fact that support from one's own department was related to providing notes, untimed tests, and alternative exams suggests that the resources required for these accommodations may come more from one's own department than from without. For example, untimed exams are arranged by faculty in a quiet area in their own department. This places the onus on the faculty member to find adequate space, a process that would be facilitated by one's own department. Similarly, the provision of notes is often done by photocopying the notes which is also dependent upon the resources of the department. The fact that support from the Deans of the College facilitated these same accommodations also suggests that material support is what is required to aid in the provision of these accommodations. These findings are further buttressed by the overall finding that if respondents felt that they had sufficient resources then it was easier to provide accommodations.

Knowing who to call when respondents' have questions regarding the provision of an accommodation proved to be significantly related to three accommodations: proctored exams, note taker, and additional time. These results are seen as a reflection of the role that LDSS plays in the provision of these particular accommodations.

The finding that support from LDSS was positively related to support from one's own department suggests the need for relationships to be clearly established between LDSS and the academic departments.

The researchers posit that providing alternative types of exams is the most labor intensive and potentially difficult accommodation. This is based upon work with faculty members who voice concern about developing comparable alternative exams. Based upon this postulation, it is noteworthy that the findings suggest that those respondents who found it easier to provide the alternative exams also reported that it was easier to provide the other accommodations. However the converse is not true. That is, the provision of less intensive accommodations was not significantly related to the provision of alternative types of exams.

The significant difference between full-time and part-time respondents in their belief about the efficacy of accommodations and their understanding of the need for accommodations suggests that perhaps the respondents who are not full time employees experience a different relationship with the university and their expectations are different. Further research into this distinction is necessary.

At this point there is no discernible reason for the difference found between male and female respondents. Further research into this area may be warranted since the present research did not focus on how gender impacts accommodation provision.

The significant difference between professors versus non professors revealed that non-professors reported that it was easier for them to provide accommodations. Also,

non-professors' level of belief about the efficacy and their understanding of the need for accommodations was greater than the professors. Similarly they reported perceiving greater support from elements of the University. It is not clear what lies at the base of these differences, but perhaps the respondents who are not on tenure tracks experience a different relationship with the university and their expectations are different. Further research into this distinction is necessary.

Implications:

This study moves the discussion of accommodating post-secondary students with learning disabilities from simply describing faculty members' level of comfort or willingness to provide accommodations to exploring the provision of accommodations in relation to institutional factors. Whereas previous research has not differentiated among the complexity of accommodations, this present study suggests that there is a hierarchy of accommodation based upon the perceived ease or difficulty faculty experience in providing the accommodation. For example, the provision of less intensive accommodations (untimed exams, proctored exams, providing notes, and additional time) were not significantly related to the provision of alternative types of exams; however, the provision of alternative types of exams was related to the provision of less labor intensive accommodations.

The results suggest a significant relationship between the level of understanding for the need of accommodations and level of belief in the efficacy of accommodation to the level of support faculty perceive from the service provider on campus (LDSS) as well as from their own departments. While this requires greater explication in future research, the present findings emphasize the need for strong working relationships among elements of the university.

The amount of resources available to faculty members appears to have a significant relationship to the provision of accommodations. While further research is necessary in order to delineate what types of resources are essential, it is clear that universities need to attend to the availability of resources to support the provision of accommodations.

Finally, the significant differences noted among demographic data in relationship to the belief in accommodations, the provision of accommodations, and the understanding of the need for accommodations points to the need for further investigation of the reason for the differences. The fact that differences were found raises concerns about significant underlying difference regarding faculty members' experiences at the University.

Limitations:

The fact that this study was limited to a single university which has its own history limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the fact that only one-third of the possible respondents actually returned completed surveys increases the likelihood that those responding may be self-selecting. While the survey instrument used was intended to address the behaviors of the faculty, the survey did not include a means to verify the actual provision of the accommodations.

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